For many years Ross Dowson closely followed and participated in developments in the trade union movement. His articles from a collection of back issues of *Workers Vanguard* present an accurate and moving story of the victories and the defeats, the present circumstances and the future prospects before this mighty and complex movement forged by the Canadian working class.

The Power and Dilemma of the Trade Unions

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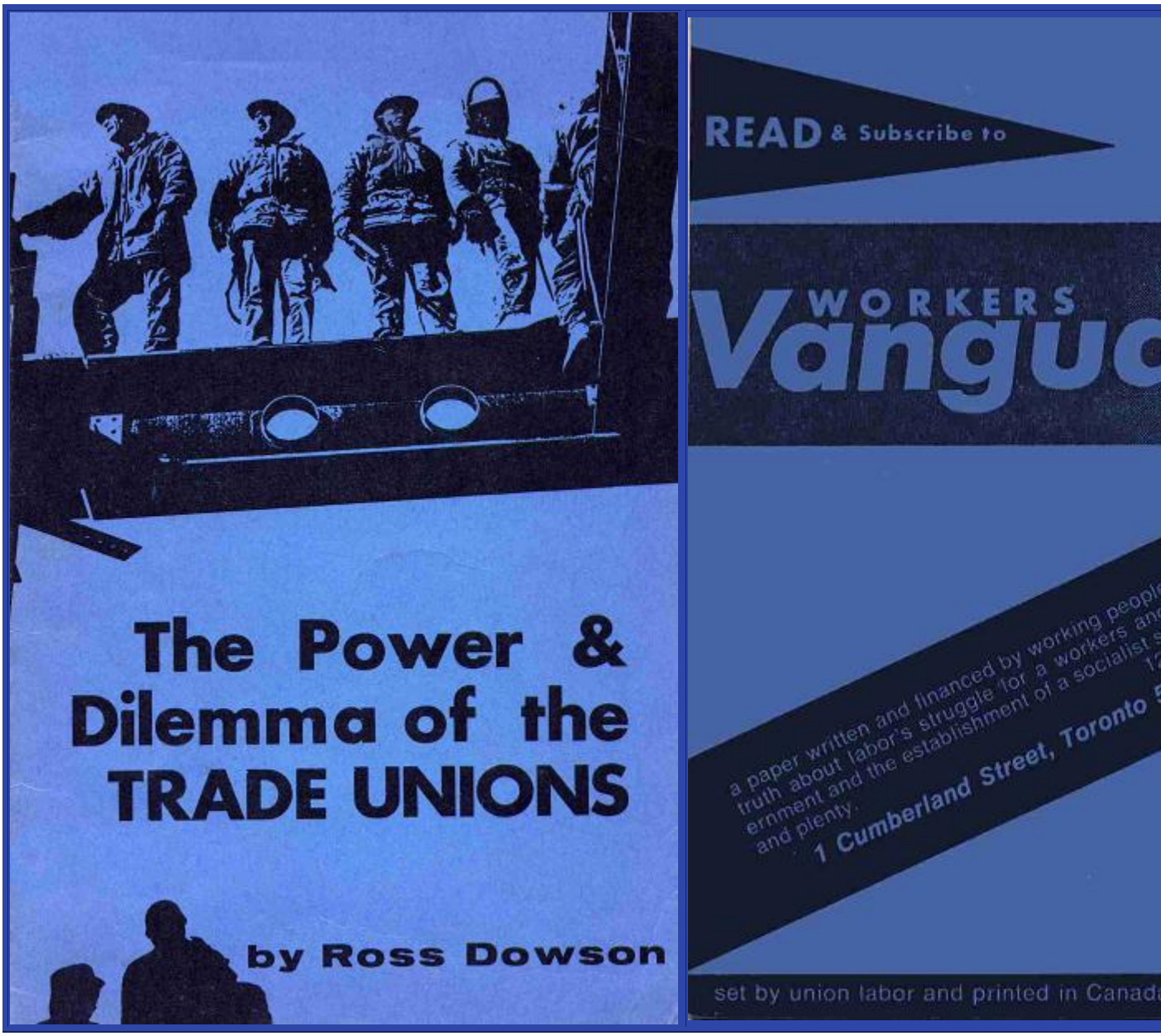
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by Ross Dowson
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Introduction

For many years the *Workers Vanguard* has closely followed and participated in developments in the trade union movement. A collection of back issues would present an accurate and moving story of the victories and the defeats, the present circumstances and the future prospects before this mighty and complex movement forged by the Canadian working class. The

article that follows is a summary, an evaluation, and a projection of Canadian labor's struggles.

It addresses itself to the students who are daily bombarded with slanted information and distortions about union struggles for better wages and conditions, to the youth just coming into the labor force and encountering for the first time picket lines, clashes with the police over injunctions, and union involvement with the New Democratic Party.

It speaks to those living on fixed incomes, to pensioners who have it drummed into them that the unions' hard won wage increases are responsible for price increases. And it speaks to trade union activists, to militants and socialists deeply involved in the workings of their locals, responding to the harassments of their bosses and fighting, often their own union leaderships, in their efforts to make their unions responsive instruments of their class interests.

There is no attempt here to relate the history of the trade union movement in any detail. Nor does this article take on the task of working out a point by point program for the union movement. Instead, the article attempts to analyse important experiences in recent union struggles and to draw from them broad generalizations and key lessons.

What is the present state and the real potential of the union movement; what is the origin and essential role of the present leadership; what is the role of the courts, parliament and the state? These and other questions are answered with bold strokes.

It is vital to see through the mass of detail, the contradictions and the difficulties in the local, national and international union situation. Consistent and effective unionism demands a clear steady picture of the entire situation and all the forces at work. If this article, even in a small way, achieves this task**of portraying the essential dynamics of the union movement in Canada**it will have achieved its purpose.

Ross Dowson has been active in the labor and socialist movement since the thirties. He has worked as a machinist and has been a member of the United Steelworkers of America (CLC-CIO). A journalist for some years now, he

is presently editor of the *Workers Vanguard*. He has visited England, Algeria, and Cuba, and written extensively on the working class movements in those countries. The following article appeared in three instalments in the spring-summer 1967 issues of *Workers Vanguard*.

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The Power & Dilemma of the TRADE UNIONS

30 per cent of all non-agricultural paid workers**1,736,000 persons at January 1966 were members of trade unions. Three quarters of them belonged to unions affiliated to the Canadian Labor Congress (AFL-CIO). The largest group outside of the CLC, the Quebec-based Confederation of National Trade Unions, acounted for 188,000**slightly less than one third of the total number of trade unionists in Quebec.

These unions appear as a tremendous social force across the country. They are the most powerful single organization, both real and potential, that those who live by their labor have yet created. Organized at the point of production, they intervene on a day-to-day basis, largely on a local but on occasion, and increasingly so, on a national and even international scale, to defend and extend the interests of their members and the entire working class against capital**against those who own and control the means of production and exploit them for their own purposes.

The mere fact of the existence of the trade unions testifies to the reality of the class nature of Canadian society. The ceaseless effort of capital to destroy them, to fetter them with oppressive legislation, and failing that, to corrupt them, is irrefutable proof of the reality of the class struggle**that there is an irreconcilable, ceaseless, conflict between labor and capital in this country.

The unions have not been able to remain as combinations of workers of one employer, or even groups of employers in associated industries.

They have developed from a unity of workers against a particular employer to unity against employers in one whole field of production, to unity of workers in entire areas. They

form a massive unified network from union local, to national, to international union**from local to area council, from provincial to the federal level**to the CLC with its 1-1/2 million members. Recognition has had to be made, even if largely formal, to the international character of labor's struggle and the need for its world-wide co-ordination.

Trade Unions Project a New Society

The union movement has proven itself to be a powerful instrument of a defensive character and as a force that poses the possibility of a fundamental transformation in socio-economic relations**from wage labor to a free association of labor and common ownership of its product**socialism.

As early as 1919 the working people of Winnipeg, arising from their common interest in the defence of a group of locked-out metal workers, waged a general strike which in its development created a new and revolutionary pole of social-political power**the Winnipeg General Strike Committee, which completely controlled the city for 41 days. It is no accident that many participants and observers from the ranks of both its supporters and opponents saw in this development a parallel to the workers' councils (soviets) that arose and seized power in Russia and took on embryonic form in other European centers in that period.

A massive strike wave broke out at the close of World War II in defiance of all the war-time restrictions that had been clamped upon the unions with the agreement of the union leadership. In wave after wave it swept up the entire organized labor movement to ring up the largest across-the-board wage increase ever and to consolidate unionism on a higher plane. The mighty Ford strike demonstrated the revolutionary temper and ingenuity of the workmg class, their readiness to meet head-on the violence of the state. The threat by an army of RCMPers to break up the picket line was countered with an impenetrable barricade, a wall of steel. The workers commandeered public

vehicles, trucks, cars, with which they jammed the highway stretching down the front of the main plant, to paralyze the police and win their strike.

Twice in the last two years the working class of two key sections of the country have advanced up to the very edge of general strike**in Quebec and in the province of British Columbia.

While capital continues to harass and persecute individual militants, to resort to the use of scabs and spies, to employ police to terrorize and smash up picket lines, with the rise of the modern labor movement, its broader unity, its increased organization and its tremendous resources, they have come to rely to an ever-increasing extent upon the state.

What labor has won through battles on the picket lines and through the enforcement of the contractual rights it has established in the shops, has often been lost, due, not only to the operation of the laws governing the capitalist system itself, inflation for instance, but to counter attacks by the representatives of the employers as a class in control of parliament, and the state in its totality.

The Power of the State

The employers, through their agents in control of parliament and the entire state apparatus, have erected a whole network of laws and regulations designed to hamstring the labor movement. Anti-labor regulations such as the BC Social Credit's Bill 43 have been characterized by the most conservative labor leaders as "fascistic". They not only bar the use of information pickets but secondary boycotts, and have decreed the unions to be legal entities responsible for the actions of every individual member. But not the least of the union-busting laws are those which the union leadership itself has come to live with**those embedded in labor relations acts. These range from the various regulations designed to make it difficult for unions to establish the fact that they represent a majority of a specific group of workers, to those

which only permit strike action after a long process of delay, that not only make it illegal to strike within the life of contracts, to the ever- increasing use of ex parte injunctions forbidding or limiting pickets, and the extension of compulsory arbitration to ever wider areas of the work force.

On the basis of their own experiences and in part due to the influence of the British working class movement, there has long been a broad strata of union leaders and rank and file activists who have favored the formation of a political arm for labor in this country. If there was any doubt about the direction of these forces with the dissolution of the socialist-oriented but largely agrarian-based CCF, the successful birth of the New Democratic Party three years ago as a labor party, with firm roots in the trade unions, was assured by the Liberal-Tory and SC anti-labor drive. With the recent solid successes in the major urban areas across the country any concept of the NDP as a pressure instrument on the Liberals and Tories in office has been smashed. The Canadian working class through their unions are firmly committed to the building of the NDP as an alternative to the parties of Big Business and to the election of an NDP government into office in both Ottawa and the provinces.

Between 1935 and 1966 trade union membership increased more than six fold**from 281,000 to 1,736,000. In these three decades there were four major periods of rapid expansion. In 1936 and 1937, which saw the rise of the CIO, union membership increased 15 and 19 per cent respectively. The next major jump came during the war**with 1941 seeing an increase of 27 per cent and 25.5 per cent in 1942. The post war upsurge saw an increase in membership in 1946 of 17 per cent and 9.7 per cent in 1947.

But in recent years **as a proportion of the work force** union membership has been decreasing. By 1962 the proportion of the work force in unions dropped from 33 per cent to 32 per cent. By 1963 the decline had continued to 30 per cent. By 1964, it was 29.4 per cent.

Deteriorating Position

Organized labor is not only weaker in relation to the growth of the work force but it is weaker from a strategic point of view. Unionism hasn't yet really broken out of the basic industries. Between 1947 and 1959 there was virtually no net change in the employment levels in the goods-producing industries despite the fact that the actual quantity of goods being produced doubled. During that period however there was an increase of new jobs in the service industries by a million. By 1958 the number of jobs in the service sector was larger than in the goods- producing industries. In 1958 the margin was 68,000**by 1963 it had grown to 771,000.

It is in this area that the tremendous expansion of the number of women in the work force has taken place. The number of women in retail and wholesale trade grew from 1950 to 1959 by more than 50 per cent. By June 1965 women workers in the service industries had surpassed men to 51.9 per cent of the total.

The present leadership of the union movement, with vast sums of money at its disposal and skilful technicians at its beck and call, has proven incapable of moving into these most rapidly expanding and often most poorly paid sectors of the work force, thus permitting a serious deterioration in the strategic position of the union movement to take place. It has failed women miserably.

Large layers of these workers, poorly paid and helpless before the onslaughts of inflation, the dangers of sickness, all the insecurities that are products of capitalist society, have fallen prey to the capitalist- inspired propaganda that the union movement is a narrow, a sectional power bloc, insensitive to their needs and concerned only with its own welfare.

The static situation in the producing industries, where expansion has been largely through technological changes, and the increasing tendency of the leadership to settle for so-called fringe benefits, including pensions, retirement funds, few of

them portable, rather than wage increases, has alienated the younger workers. There has been a distinct tendency for the unions to deteriorate from combat organizations of the class into welfare organizations for older workers upon whom the administration has come to base itself. The unions under the present leadership have failed the youth.

For the first time in decades organized labor has suffered a series of setbacks. Just as the decrease in the percentage of workers who are actually organized is not due in any way to an organizational saturation point having been reached, but to a failure on the part of the present leadership, so too these setbacks do not reflect any decline in the combativity of the ranks, but a failure of leadership.

Two notable defeats were those suffered by the Royal York Hotel workers and the workers at the Lever Brothers plant in Toronto. These setbacks all the more point up the failure in leadership in that they took place in an area where organized labor has its greatest concentration of strength. Even more startling is the situation confronting the oldest continuing local in the country**International Typographical Union, Local 91**which has been locked in struggle in Canada's first automation strike with the Big Three Toronto dailies for three years now. *(Subsequently, in a major setback for TTU 91, the* Toronto Telegram *rather than settle went out of business – ed.)*

Crisis of Leadership

The entry of the CIO onto the Canadian arena and the organization of key basic industries along industrial lines threw up a whole new layer of leaders. Unlike the long-time secure craft business unionists, many of them rose out of the ranks, and many were radicals. With the coming of the Second World War this leadership collaborated with the bosses in the introduction under the union auspices of piece work and speed-up. With the close of the war, when the employers ended this honeymoon and strode out to smash the unions, the ranks proved able to

overcome all the leadership's hesitations, to turn back the union busters and even establish new gains.

Frustrated in their frontal attack, Big Business launched a co- ordinated coast to coast legal assault on labor. Instead of taking up this challenge, meeting it head-on, the leadership preached caution. When as in BC a massive cry went up against Bill 43 and for general strike, the leadership preached submission until the next election. The impact of this legislation is graphically portrayed in the following figures:

	Union membership	Work force	% of work force
1958	233,972	434,000	53.9
1959	219,279	452,000	48.1
1964	226,690	531,000	42.7

As the figures show, the failure of the leadership to mobilize the unions against the union-busting laws has not only resulted in a drastic decline in the strength of the organized labor movement as a percentage of the work force but in absolute numbers.

What is wrong with the present leadership of the Canadian labor movement, that it has failed to effectively mobilize the mighty forces of the Canadian working class to fend off the legal assault on their unions, that it has failed to organize the unorganized, that, with all the resources at its disposal, it has permitted a relative and in some areas an absolute decline in the strength of the unions to take place? It is true that the leadership is a relatively privileged strata, with considerable wealth at its disposal, secure in its position, and thus concerned that there be no undue upset in the present state of affairs. But the problem is more profound than that.

In the past few years court injunctions restricting and barring picketing have been successful in gravely weakening and even smashing an increasing number of union locals. The CLC leadership decided to stage a showdown at the struck Thompson newspaper in the union stronghold of Oshawa. Its demonstration of strength in defiance of the law, found the

attorney general and provincial premier disclaiming any responsibility to uphold this class legislation, and the company, with the agreement of the courts, withdrawing its court order.

Only a matter of weeks later in a similar situation in nearby Peterborough, when an injunction was read and 28 arrested, the top brass ordered the demobilization of their controlled demonstration with the aim of arguing the matter on strictly legal terms in the courts. The top leadership carried their line in the face of a powerful protest at the Winnipeg CLC convention and a demand from the floor for massive passive resistance to the union busting injunctions. Even more shameful was the CLC leadership's response to the militant challenges against strikebreaking injunctions that developed in BC and resulted in the jailing of four of the BC Federation's leadership. The latter's heroic defiance of the courts and the response that their principled conduct won from the ranks for mass action brought the CLC machine into action all right. But only to isolate and quench every spark of militancy.

Bankruptcy of Present Leadership

Its strategy in the fight against injunctions is to win the courts and the judges, with fine legal argument, over to the side of labor. And that is its policy with regard to parliament and the state. The bureaucracy hopes to neutralize the state which it sees as having only temporarily fallen into the hands of agents of the monopolists, with some elements aiming to win it over to their side and even fill it with their content. That is why it has no qualms about urging state intervention in strictly union affairs.

The CLC leadership, with the support of the entire working class Press**except that of the socialist *Workers Vanguard***demanded that the government overcome its show of reluctance and intervene in a strictly internal union matter by imposing a trusteeship on the SIU *(Seafarers')* and the Great Lakes seamen. They demanded the government enforce the law to the limit against the seamen who marched in protest against

government interference in their internal affairs. They have continued to uphold the government trusteeship in the face of the dangers that it holds for organized labor as clearly voiced by its own representative on the board of trustees.

As these events reveal, the leadership of Canada's union movement is essentially reformist in its outlook. Its support of the NDP flows not so much from a desire to supplement militant on-the-job action with aggressive political action, but to substitute periodic visits to the ballot box for such militant action. In the place of a revolutionary, of a class struggle opposition to capitalism, the strategy that shaped the foundations of the labor movement and upon which it has risen to its present state of power, they stand for a peaceful coexistence policy with capitalism.

Because of its orientation this trade union leadership, which sees itself as part of the established order of things, poses the gravest peril to democracy within the union movement. It was with complete consistency with its lengthy record that the CLC leadership underwrote the old national leadership of the Canadian Postal Employees Association and fronted for the Liberal government against the rank and file during the 18 day national postal workers strike last summer. Thanks to the Montreal local leaders who had patiently built rank-and-file connections across the country the CLC leadership were defeated, the old postal leadership routed, and unionism is now spreading through the civil servants. It was no accident that important CLC leaders publicly approved of a trusteeship imposed on a Toronto local by an American international leadership at the head of which stands James Hoffa, a man whose actions they would never normally approve regardless of their possible merit.

This clique, this bureaucracy that encrusts the trade union movement heads up a great multiplicity of expensive and unwieldy organizations of a widely diverse character. It is a labyrinth of conflicting clique interests with overlapping jurisdictions which result in all kinds of divisive conflicts that weaken labor in the face of the enemy. Some unions are strictly

national formations, others are international. Some ot the latter are set up along Canadian district lines, which assure considerable autonomy for the Canadian machinery, and others are so much under the domination of the international leadership that even me business agents are imposed upon them.

Alternatives to the Present Situation

This situation has led some to see the key problem as being largely organizational and to project structural changes as the solution. Bureaucracy is as rife in some syndicalist, anti-political-oriented unions as it is in the unions most active in promotion of political action in their ranks. Nor does largeness or smallness appear to have any significant bearing on the question. In fact it is the extremely wide diversity in structure and structural relations, and yet the general prevalence of bureaucracy, that shows the irrelevancy of such a concept. While there are no doubt many structural changes that could be made in the interest of assuring a democratic milieu and a greater fighting unity, the granting to the CLC more constitutional authority over its affiliates, as some propose at this time, would not heighten the fighting unity of labor against capital. Quite the contrary.

The cry for Canadian trade union autonomy has also been raised as a panacea. The Canadian Communist Party has not only called for autonomy but has used what influence it has had to encourage some Canadian breakaways from international unions and the constitution of separate national unions. Aside from the question of the viability ot such bodies they have not in any way proved immune to the virus of bureaucracy. There are Canadian, strictly Canadian unions that are as bureaucratically controlled as any international union. While in general the American trade union movement is more bureaucracy-ridden, this virus is not peculiar to the United States, slipping into this country via personnel of the internationally affiliated unions.

Should we draw a balance sheet of the pluses and minuses of the American connection? On the plus side the amount of

money kicked back to support Canadian strikes; the influence that Canadian members of an international union can hope to have in promoting an American Labor Party; the fact that the votes of the Canadian district membership of the United Steelworkers were decisive in the defeat of the Donald MacDonald-led machine; the preparations of Auto and Steel to mobilize their US forces to bring Canadian members' wages up to parity with US wages; the intervention of the International prohibiting Toronto mailers from accepting a contract that would undermine national and international newspaper standards. And on the minus side, the imposition of international roadmen on Canadian affiliates, control over international strike funds and authority over strikes, etc.

The mere process of attempting to work out all the pluses and minuses and to strike a balance only exposes the absurdity of it all. The method is false. It is sterile, for it fails to take into account the dynamics of the struggle. It is all the more absurd in that the major sectors of industrial capital in Canada are in firm alliance with or are controlled by the same monopolists with whom the more concentrated and more powerful US unions are in conflict.

The fact that the struggle for democracy in the unions is a primary task before the workers of the United States, as well as Canada, demonstrates that it has nothing to do with some national peculiarities, but flows from a common source**the increasing intervention of the bourgeois democratic state in the internal affairs of the union movement and the tendency of a growing together of the trade unions with the state.

To break out of the straightjacket it is necessary to win the unions to a revolutionary orientation, to give them a class struggle program and to forge a new leadership. This is the crucial task; to work in the unions as they are now constituted, to transform them into instruments for the establishment of a new social order. The situation is becoming increasingly more favorable for success.

The Rising New Militancy

Over the past year there has been a sharp rise in the number of strikes and the number of workers involved right across the country. The strikes have been extremely militant. They have been taking place in a period of general boom, rising wages, considerable job mobility, etc.

In Quebec they have been unfolding wave upon wave. Entire new layers of workers, including a high percentage of white collar and professional workers, have joined labor's ranks. They have not been solicited to join, rather they have knocked down the door in their demand for admission. They are bringing into the Quebec movement a verve, a new dynamism which will infect all Canadian labor. A highly significant number of strikes in other parts of the country have been wildcats**many of them violent repudiations of agreements solemnly negotiated by the leadership, others explosive outbursts against the failure of the union leadership to respond to accumulated grievances.

So prevalent has the revolt become that various top leaders have felt called upon to publicly comment on it. President Little of the Canadian Union of Public Employees admitted that there was a lack of rapport between the leadership and the ranks which he attributes to inadequacy in the unions' education program**for the ranks of course. CBRT Secretary-treasurer Secord attributed it to the surge of new workers into the union and a growing gap between them and the leaders. He noted back in 1963 that about 50 of the membership were not in the union during the strike 13 years earlier. Steel director Mahoney attributes it to the fact that "there is less and less satisfaction on the job and more uncertainty about the role of the worker and his place in the social scheme".

Steel director Mahoney's comment "on the mood of rebellion to be found today" is only a reflection of the profound rejection by an increasing number of workers of the routinist and thoroughly reformist policies of the trade union bureaucracy. They also show the developing receptivity of a widening layer of workers for an alternative, a revolutionary program.

Wage increases, hard fought wage increases to meet the rising cost of living, are being wiped out time and again by inflation. The profit gouging of the monopolists hoisted the cost of living 3.7% last year. The finance minister has recently announced that the cost of living will skyrocket another 4% this coming year.

In its running commentaries on the day-to-day problems confronting the trade unions, the *Workers Vanguard* has proposed the answer**the sliding scale of wages. Protect past wage increases and preserve the fighting strength of labor for new gains by inserting an escalator clause in every union contract! Such a clause will guarantee automatic wage increases with each rise in the cost of living.

But the workers want more than to defend themselves from the situation**they want to know why! They are not only questioning their own place in the social scheme, as Mahoney noted, but the place of others, and the social scheme itself.

NDP leader Douglas gave voice to this sentiment in his recent appeal to the government to constitute a prices review board. He outlined that "such a board would be able to examine the books, the profit and loss statements, and the cost accounting material of the particular industries concerned, in order to find out whether or not increased wage costs and increased costs of raw materials warranted the increase which is being imposed on the public". Mr. Douglas left it to the government, whose anti-combines regulations have operated as licenses to practice, and expressed his proposals with studied impartiality, as one who of course accepts the sanctity of capitalist ownership of great industrial enterprises.

As Big Business attempts to narrow the area of collective bargaining, the trade union militants must fight to widen it and to open up the entire process of capitalist production and distribution to their scrutiny. The trade union bureaucracy and their counterparts in the top leadership of the NDP talk about planning but their planning not only comes up to a halt before the concept of government ownership, it contains no element at all of involvement of the workers.

The workers have the right to know the secrets of a factory, of a trust, of an entire industry, of the whole economy, built by their labor. Open the books! Abolish all business secrets! Open the maze of deals and swindles that flow from capitalist anarchy and the shameless pursuit of profits. Extend the authority of the unions in the direction of factory committees and towards actual control of industry

While the technological revolution called automation is developing unevenly through the Canadian economy it has unleashed a wave of grave anxiety through the ranks of the working class. What is going to happen to older workers? To the vast majority of workers? To trades and skills so patiently acquired? And what training and education, if any, is worth acquiring in the face of this revolution?

In contrast to the NDP and trade union leadership who continue to talk in terms of education of what would be a narrow elite, the world famous scientist Sir Geoffrey Vickers told a Toronto audience that we need to find a way "to distribute goods and services free, according to need"**"a social revolution", as he called it.

To guarantee that the inventive genius of man benefits all of society, and not a small clique of monopolists, the unions must win a sliding scale of hours. Everyone has a right to work. Share the leisure and the increased wealth that can come with the full implementation of automation by instituting a continually diminishing work week with no loss in pay!

The single most important advance of Canadian labor in recent decades is the rise and consolidation of the NDP as a labor party. So far the trade union bureaucracy have succeeded in curtailing union participation in the NDP. They have given the unions as their main function, the provisioning of funds for the party machine.

For the bureaucracy, the labor party is an attempt to overcome their weakness on the economic front**to increase their points of pressure on the big business interests. It is not a

supplement but a substitute for the mobilization of the unions behind a class struggle program on a day to day basis.

For the workers, independent labor political action is the beginning of their intervention into affairs that determine every single aspect of their lives and the future of their children. The labor party is a result of their increasing awareness that political decisions, now made in the overall interests of the employers as a class in control of the state apparatus, determine: who shall bear the main tax burden, mortgage rates, the character of education, the extent and nature of welfare legislation, etc. Politics determine the very circumstances under which the factory or office at which they work functions, the commitment of the country's wealth, including participation in such aggressive military affiances as NATO and NORAD and support both political and material of Washington's war of aggression in Vietnam, in fact not only how we live but whether we will continue to live or be destroyed in the nuclear holocaust.

Last year's CLC convention was confronted with the submission of 25 resolutions on international affairs. While the position adopted on Vietnam was scarcely more critical of Washington's perilous policies than the Liberal government's, nonetheless it testifies to the broadening outlook of the working class in the wider, the overriding issues of our time.

The local unions must intervene fully in the NDP. They must do all in their power to elect NDP governments in the provinces and in Ottawa. They must demand reports from the NDP MPs, pass resoltions for their guidance, raise the entire political level of the membership to assure that the NDP not only gives voice to the needs of the workers but sensitively reflects and functions entirely in their interests.

The Conflict with Bureaucracy

The trade union bureaucracy, while it has considerable material resources and an extensive machine at its disposal, has no independent base of its own. It is suspended between the

workers and the employers. It attempts to maintain a balance between these irreconcilable forces.

In so far as the trade union bureaucracy challenges the employers**that is**insofar as it is independent of them**it must base itself on the workers who sustain the unions for the protection they afford them. Insofar as it hopes to be accepted by the capitalists, the bureaucracy must prove its ability to perform a useful function for them**essentially that of being their lieutenants in the ranks of the working class.

The past few years have seen a growing conflict between the ranks and the leadership. This phenomenon has become so widespread that personnel supervisors and management advisors are openly expressing sympathy and understanding for the union brass in its difficulty to control the ranks, urging their clients to understand the problem and establish a new relationship with them.

The revolt in the unions comes primarily from the new elements who have been flooding into the work force and their impact on the scattering of old militants who have been holding on over the years.

The press has been full of material on the revolt of the youth**the ferment on the campus and the total rejection of the established community by those who constitute Toronto's Yorkville *(then the centre of the youth counter-culture –ed.)* and its counterpart in other major Canadian cities. But the bulk of this generation in revolt is in the work force. For all the official talk about education they have been driven there by constantly rising university fees, the cost of books, and the mounting cost of living.

The Impact of the Youth

According to a statement by a CLC official, by 1970 the number of workers in the 24 to 27 year age group will have

increased by one third. By 1975 this group will have climbed by 57%.

They are not primarily in the long-organized basic industries where despite increased production, the work force has remained relatively frozen and older workers predominate thanks to the protection of the seniority clauses in union contracts. They are however on the key production lines of these industries. In their majority the youth are in the service industries many of which are only now in the process of being organized.

Few of the young workers have yet moved into the unions, few attend meetings and even fewer play any active role in union affairs. They tend to identify unionism with the union brass. They neither know the history of their class nor the scope of the task before them. Nonetheless they have been a vital factor in the new militancy. They are critical. They want solutions. They want action.

The recent postal workers strike, which resulted in most areas in the reconstitution of the union leadership from top to bottom, saw the picket lines set up and manned by youth. The bulk of them had never attended a union meeting, in fact had not even taken out membership in the association.

The active base of support of the union leadership in the shops is very narrow. Their real support, and it is largely a passive base of support, are the more highly skilled, the older workers who have a stake in the retirement fund, who have a real personal concern about the policing of seniority clauses. They are by and large the most conservative element in the shop.

It is this phenomenon that has made the unions so unresponsive to the needs of the ranks, that has caused the ranks to see little possibility of effecting vital changes**less and less through the union machinery, and more and more through independent action as pressure on the machine.

While the union ranks have been demonstrating a new and higher combativity**they have not yet come to seriously

challenge the union bureaucracy. The explosive outbursts have had successes, but at best they have been only partial successes**they have been contained in one shop, or in an area of one union, and their force continues to be largely dissipated.

The winning of the trade unions to a class struggle orientation depends on two interrelated factors; (1) the development of a program that logically arises out of the experiences of the rank and file, that reflects their needs and present level of understanding and takes them forward, united in anti-capitalist struggle; (2) the bringing together of the necessary forces to give this program life, to adapt it to specific conditions, to effectively disseminate it, to explain it, to defend it**and to integrate these forces as a leadership that will not only challenge the old leadership but will prove its superiority and replace it.

While the number of conscious militants is as yet small, they have in various situations proven capable on a limited scale of working out the necessary program in general outline and even effectively adapting it to specific circumstances.

Build a New Leadership

The situation is increasingly favorable for the coalescing of a left wing. But the process is a highly contradictory one. The combativity of the workers, lacking a conscious and mature leadership to develop and direct it, fluctuates wildly. Even the better militants, deprived of necessary experience and education, suffer big gaps in their understanding.

A patient and methodical approach to each specific situation is required. Some militants, inspired by the need for action and by the possibilities of carrying it out, have moved too quickly or failed to establish sufficient support under themselves, and, particularly vulnerable to attack from the bosses and under the hostility of the bureaucracy, have become isolated, ineffective**if not victimized.

An important part of the forces which will bring together the new militant leadership are the new layers of youth coming into the work force with their critical attitudes to all established conditions, many of them from the anti-war movement and some even socialist. The older militants who have been holding on over the years and whose spirits are being lifted, can speed up the integration of these new militants and fuse them into the ranks of the older workers whose support must be won.

The militants must carry on a constant activity whereby they demonstrate that they are the best unionists, the most committed and the most loyal to their class, the most able defenders of what has already been won in struggle with the bosses, and those with the best ideas and the firmest will to extend the interests of the working class.

All the evidence tells us that we are moving into a new and stormy period in Canadian labor history. The old reformist unionism is a thing of the past. A new class struggle, revolutionary unionism is in the process of birth. The militants, the new generation coming into the world force have the responsibility, they have the opportunity, of preparing themselves to move out, to develop the necessary program and build the necessary leadership that can lead the struggles of the Canadian workers to their socialist resolution.

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